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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to explore systematically language attitudes among the younger and more socially mobile Mexican Americans, to determine what linguistic and demographic variables are correlated with differential language attitudes, and to ascertain to what extent, if any, attitudinal commitment to Spanish correlates with behavioral commitment to Spanish maintenance. The sample population was composed of 164 students of Mexican descent enrolled at the University of Texas, Austin. Generally speaking, attitudinal language loyalty among the respondents was high, with negative attitudes based exclusively on pragmatic considerations. Attitudinal language loyalty does not, however, necessarily correlate with behavioral commitment to it, as behavioral commitment to language loyalty appears to be primarily a function of linguistic ability, rather than of overt attitudinal orientation, whether the latter be sustained by instrumental, ideological, or affective considerations. While Mexican-American college students favor Spanish language maintenance, they do not belittle the functional needs for English, and they are highly conscious of the potential or actual difficulties that ensue not only from limited English proficiency but from accented English as well. (Author/DB)

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# Language Attitudes towards Spanish Among Mexican American College Students

The role of attitudinal variables has recently become a central concern to sociolinguists. Given the focus of sociolinguistic studies, the multiple aspects of covariation between linguistic and sociocultural structures and behaviours, it is not surprising that the importance of attitudinal variables should have been recognized and its role actively investigated in recent years. The relevance of attitudinal variables is obvious to sociolinguistic topics such as language choice and differential code allocations in multilingual settings, revaluations and devaluations of speech varieties and their reinforcement or displacement, language maintenance and language shift processes, language policies and language planning endeavors.[1]

While language attitudes constitute today a central concept in sociolinguistic investigations, there is no consensus in either theory or research concerning what should be included or excluded from their definitions. Language attitudes as exemplified in research practice represent a vast continuum which ranges from definitions in terms of their referent, language, to all those attitudinal variables which influence language behaviour and behaviour towards language. It has recently been pointed out by Joshua A. Fishman that neither end of this continuum is entirely satisfactory in either theory or research. According to Fishman language attitudes should be defined in terms of their referent and amplified to include not only language but language behaviour and referents of which language or language behaviour is a marker or symbol.[2] Thus attitudes towards Spanish, towards features of Spanish such as dialect variants, towards the use of Spanish for intragroup purposes, towards Spanish as an ethnic identity marker, towards Spanish maintenance and shift, would all be language attitudes. Conversely, attitudes towards Latin or Mexican Americans are

not language attitudes *per se* although they might be reflected by attitudes towards Spanish or English speech-varieties of Spanish speakers.

Whether we define language attitudes in the narrow or wide sense, the number of studies dealing with language attitudes towards Spanish among Mexican Americans is very limited and their origin very recent. The first studies appeared in the mid-sixties.[3] From these studies we have learned that language maintenance did not represent a consciously avowed goal among respondents in San Antonio; that the usage of Spanish was associated with considerable social stress in domains other than those under private control, and that mother-tongue continuity when considered desirable, was not justified upon ethnic grounds, such as the preservation of the group as a distinct entity (this was perceived mainly in terms of its subordinate socio-economic status) but rather upon humanistic and cultural values. If language maintenance succeeded, which it did, it was due to habitual usage and other factors, rather than to ideological elaboration or conviction. A large-scale more recent study reinforces these findings.[4] The Mexican American population of San Antonio when asked what they would like to see their children retain of Mexican ways, gave priority to manner and customs (38%) rather than to language (31%). Respondents from Los Angeles, on the other hand, where Mexicanness is less of a liability because of the greater permisiveness of the environment, the greater opportunity of upward mobility and the greater English proficiency of the Mexican American population, gave preference to Spanish maintenance by a far greater margin (51%). In both San Antonio and Los Angeles, the desire for language retentiveness seemed to be positively correlated with social status. It was mentioned far more often among the well-to-do than the poor.

Ongoing changes within the ethnic community, particularly in California, progressive urbanization, greater educational attainment and occupational diversi-

fication, and within the mainstream society the civil rights movements and the bilingual education act, have lately facilitated the rise of what is commonly referred to as the Chicano movement. The Chicano movement brought along with it a profusion of political and literary writings in which a revaluation and ideologization of Spanish is for the first time fully articulated. The goals of the movement aim not only at improving the socio-economic and educational status of the minority group, but its ethnic self-image and status honor, as well. Its adherents, responsive to the heightened need for attaining group cohesiveness which might facilitate further socio-economic gains, make frequent reference to the Hispanic heritage--cultural and linguistic--as contrastive components of self-identity, authencity and pride. While class conflicts and discrimination might be the stronger driving force behind the rise and growth of Chicano assertiveness than is the will to ethnic distinctiveness itself, the effectiveness of the movement is undoubtedly reinforced by its dual appeal to self-interest and affective ties. Chicano nationalism, in the sense of ethno-cultural identity, rather than political ideology linked to the establishment of a separate territorial entity, has thus far been primarily an urban and intellectual phenomenon. It has stirred only the Chicano elites, its writers, leaders and students, and among these just the younger generations.[5] Whether it can or will mobilize the middle classes and proletariat is far from certain. While ethnic unity itself is favored by vast majorities in such different settings as Los Angeles (81%) and San Antonio (90%), there is far less agreement on the reasons underlying this goal, and least of all when it comes to endorsing cultural unity. The attainment of political influence and social gains are far more commonly claimed than the notion of cultural unity, to which only a few subscribe, 11% and 17% in San Antonio and Los Angeles respectively.[6]

From these brief introductory remarks it is evident that attitudes

towards Spanish and language consciousness among Mexican Americans are highly diversified. We know that Spanish language usage is associated with stress by some and with ethnic authenticity by others. However, we have very few indications of the individual characteristics that are correlated with differential orientations towards Spanish and the justifications that might be advanced in favor of its maintenance. The present study is an attempt to explore systematically language attitudes among the younger and more socially mobile Mexican Americans, to determine what linguistic and demographic variables are correlated with differential language attitudes, and to ascertain to what extent, if any, attitudinal commitment to Spanish correlates with behavioural commitment to Spanish maintenance.

Sample Population

One hundred and sixty-four students of Mexican descent enrolled at the University of Texas, Austin, served as respondents. The student population showed a wide distributional range on several important variables: language proficiency, currently and developmentally; language usage; socio-economic status; provenance and generation of residence in the United States. Occupational status of the fathers ranged from unskilled laborers to professionals and managers. The mean occupational status, however, was low. It was represented by skilled laborers. Educational attainment of the fathers varied from none to graduate and professionals, the latter being represented by a minority of 14%. Provenance was represented by metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas with both a very high concentration of Mexican Americans and only a marginal representation of the same ethnic group. The majority however, was born and spent their childhool years in areas which contain large segments of Mexican Americans. Generation of residence in the United States spanned from recent immigrants to native-born respondents of native parentage. Fifty percent of the sample population was of

foreign-stock parentage, and the other half of native-born parentage. Not all of the respondents claimed Spanish as their mother tongue, 32% claimed English, and 18% both Spanish and English. While there are significant between-group differences regarding current bilingual proficiency depending upon which language was spoken first, only 5% of the total population claims greater profiency in Spanish today, as opposed to a majority of 75% which claims to be more proficient in English, and the rest, 20%, claim equal facility in both languages.

Methodology

The data on all variables, demographic, linguistic and attitudinal, was gathered by mail questionnaires during the Summer of 1974. Among the information sought by the personal background questionnaire, in addition to the items already mentioned, was the respondent's graduate or undergraduate status, his/her degree expectations, and affiliation with Mexican American organizations.

The language usage section consisted of multiple-choice items and asked about the frequency of Spanish usage within several domains and with different age-groups. Language profiency measures, based on a four point scale, dealt with questions regarding language competence and dominance developmentally and currently.

The section covering language attitudes, which are restricted to Fishman's definition, consisted mostly of open-question items in order to encourage the respondents to express their individual views about the focal object with no leads from the questions themselves. Since generally only modest relationships have been found between attitudinal measures and overt linguistic behaviour, a commitment question was included.[7] The respondents were asked if they had undertaken any measures in the last two years to strengthen their knowledge of Spanish.

The following processing operations were performed on the data: a) a varimax

orthogonal factor analysis which yielded a three factor solution; b) analyses of variance on each factor in order to test for the relationship of linguistic and demographic variables upon differential factor scores.

The findings of this study will first be presented in terms of the responses which are shared by the group as a whole, and then in terms of the clusters that resulted from the factor analysis and the relationships between individual characteristics and differential orientations to Spanish language loyalty.

Analyses and Results

Attitudinal language loyalty among Mexican American college students is high. Leaving aside for the moment the rationales advanced in favor of Spanish, the majority of the students view the Spanish language as a positive referent, (84.5), regret the on-going language shift they claim to perceive among the younger generations (67.7) and consider that Spanish usage should be encouraged (86.5) because it represents an important component of community life. They believe that in order to insure language maintenance socialization in Spanish at home and at school are indispensable (62.2%). They also believe that socialization in Spanish is more vital than other potential measures such as an attitudinal change within the dominant society (15.9), which is perceived as intolerant of if not opposed to ethno-linguistic diversity. Continued close contact among Mexican Americans is also deemed necessary to sustain Spanish maintenance in the long run (82.9%).

Most of the respondents (63.4) attribute greater experssiveness to Spanish than English for certain topics and situations and viceversa. When questioned however, as to the actual speech situations for which each language is more appropriate, only a small number was able to conceptualize these. Among the topics for which Spanish was considered more expressive were cultural

matters (25%), intragroup interaction (12.2%) and affective matters (34.1%). For political (8.5%), technical (23.8%), academic (23.8%) and occupational (13.4%) pursuits, English was considered more appropriate and expressive as well. The overall low rate of responses in this area might be surprising particularly in view of the fact that Spanish usage was considered by a far greater number to be intimately related to intragroup life. These discrepancies are accounted for when current linguistic competence and behaviour among the respondents are considered. For the majority, English is currently the dominant tongue, and its frequency of usage exceeds that of Spanish in all spheres of interaction excepting those which involve the older generations, parents and grandparents. Since language usage seems to be primarily determined by the linguistic proficiency of the interlocutors, rather than by a diaglossic norm in which Spanish and English are accorded differential allocations, it is understandable that difficulties should arise in conceptualizing domain separations when few if any obtain in actual speech situations.

While Spanish is more valued in the abstract than English, it is not preferred over English for intimate, relaxed conversations. Linguistic facility, claimed by the majority (84.1%), determines language choice rather than expressive considerations, suscribed only by a few (4.9%). The greater expressiveness attributed to Spanish seems, thus, to be rooted in the past rather than the present and to flow from its being the first language learned or heard in intimate home circumstances, rather than from the language itself, such as structural, lexical or phonological nuances derived from a cognitive matrix.

There is less agreement among the respondents in relation to the potential difficulties engendered by a dual linguistic loyalty. Only a few view bilingualism as non-problematic and free of disadvantages without any qualifications. The majority, however, (56.1%), emphasizes that bilingualism is problem-free

only for those individuals with near native-like command of English. Those who claim that bilingualism does engender difficulties, (32.4%), do not, however, believe that the difficulties stem from the bilingual speaker himself. The conflicts are perceived as arising from unfavorable attitudes held by members of the dominant society towards accented speech, and by extension, towards the speaker himself.

The rationales advanced in favor of Spanish are covered by three content categories. These are based upon ideological, instrumental and affective considerations. Within the first category Spanish is legitimized upon ethnic grounds. However, ideological support for Spanish, is not sought primarily within the family or the ethnic community, but beyond it. It is sought from historical arguments, from the primacy of the Spanish-speaking groups in the United States, the cultural and literary achievements of Hispanic ancestors, and the functional importance of Spanish on the European and American continents. Spanish is viewed as a link with and symbol of the Hispanic heritage and language maintenance is considered essential if cultural continuity is to be preserved for oneself and future generations. The usage of Spanish among Mexican Americans is thought of as expressing (and expressive of) ethnic solidarity.

Within the second category, Spanish is justified upon non-ethnic grounds. It is valued for instrumental, interpersonal and cultural reasons, derived from its usefulness in many occupational pursuits and in bridging the communication gap between the older and younger Mexican-American generations, and the other Spanish-speaking people in the United States and abroad. Setting aside pragmatic considerations, the knowledge of another language is viewed as an enriching experience in itself, of which the respondents as a whole seem to be proud of.

Within the last category, which comprises the smallest number of responses, Spanish is validated primarily upon affective grounds. Spanish is cherished not so much in itself or for any extrinsic properties that might be associated with it, but rather because it is embedded in childhood memories, in intimate familial relationships and all those experiences that are near and dear to one's innermost self. Only secondarily is Spanish viewed as a referent to the ethnic group and its cultural heritage.

The commitment to Spanish language maintenance when judged by the respondents' behavioural implementation, rather than attitudinal orientation, is a far scarcer commodity. Only one fourth of them have undertaken any measures in the last two years to expand their proficiency in Spanish. The strongest commitment is found among those who have taken formal coursework, independent from any degree requirements. Among the others, increased frequency of usage, self-instruction and greater exposure to Spanish reading-materials represent the most common options.

There are few overt negative responses to Spanish, 6.7% of the total. Negative evaluations of Spanish are based exclusively on pragmatic considerations. Spanish language usage among Mexican Americans is deplored and its maintenance rejected, because of their presumed retarding effect upon assimilation to the dominant society and its tongue, and the socio-economic gains that ensue from it. The Spanish language itself is perceived as a negative referent, as it is identified as part and parcel of the educational gap and lack of social mobility that plague the ethnic groups. Since language retentiveness is believed to have brought nothing but deprivation, it is assumed that the sooner Spanish is relinquished, the faster these gaps will be bridged.

A somewhat more complex picture emerges from the factor analysis to which we now turn. Factor I is represented by positive attitudinal responses to Spanish,

without consideration of instrumental, ideological or affective justifications advanced in its favor. It indicates that all those who view Spanish positively, consider language shift a loss of one type or another, and are accordingly in favor of continued language maintenance.

Since attitudinal positiveness is too widely claimed, and its range of variance too restricted, none of the variables chosen were significantly related to differential factor scores: father's educational attainment and occupational status, birthplace of the respondent and generation of residence in the United States, his/her upper/underclassman status at the University, degree expectation, membership in Mexican American organizations, the first language spoken developmentally and current linguistic dominance. Only nativity approached significance. Respondents of foreign parentage had somewhat higher positive attitudinal scores than those of native parentage.

Factor II is represented by behavioural commitment to language maintenance. It indicates that respondents who claim to use more Spanish lately than they did five years ago are also the ones who tend to have undertaken some measures to expand their proficiency in Spanish, whether it be formal coursework, self-study or some other options. Higher behavioural commitment scores are found among those respondents who claim a coordinate rather than subordinate bilingualism, and possibly among those who spoke Spanish as the first language rather than English or both Spanish and English. Mother tongue only approached statistical significance within this sample, but it is highly likely that with a larger sample it would have proven to be an important factor in behavioural commitment. Factor III includes those favorable attitudes towards Spanish which are either justified upon ideological or emotional grounds, and as such are more affect-invested and less de-ethnicized than those based upon instrumental values alone. The Spanish language, its usage and maintenance are either symbolically elaborated or charged with emotional significance. An affect-invested orientation towards Spanish tends

to occur among respondents of low socio-economic background who claim Spanish as their mother tongue, have high Spanish usage scores with peers, hold high degree expectations, and are affiliated with Mexican American organizations.

It should not be inferred from these results that a causal relationship exists between an ideological orientation towards Spanish and higher Spanish-usage scores. No analysis has been performed as yet to see whether in effect such a relationship obtains. Before the claim can be made validly several controls have to be applied, since low socio-economic status is positively associated with high Spanish-usage scores independently of attitudinal orientation. It is possible therefore, that by controlling this factor no differential language-usage scores will obtain.

Nativity only approached statistical significance, but it is highly interesting inasmuch as respondents of native rather than foreign parentage tended to favor ethno-cultural pluralism. The overall results suggest that ethno-cultural consciousness and bicultural pluralism are more likely to be overtly upheld among the native than the foreign born, the more dispossessed than the better-off, and the more politicized; and that therefore it may be in direct ratio to how much the respondents have become americanized and made aware of their individual rights and the discrepancies that exist between the American creed and their own realities. Such awareness among the native-born is further enhanced by the fact that they are also more likely to take the Anglo group as a frame of reference in judging their respective status than their equivalent groups in Mexico, as may be the case among respondents of foreign-born parentage.

## Conclusions

It is not surprising that attitudinal language loyalty among college students should both be more intense and more fully verbalized than among the general Mexican American population or older generations. College students represent

the most educated, English-proficient and upwardly mobile segment of their ethnic group. As a result of it, they can more easily conceptualize and justify their beliefs about the importance of Spanish than could their less educated and less English-proficient fellow ethnics, who are struggling over status improvement or status maintenance. The students' favorable orientation towards their ethnic tongue conforms to language attitudes held by other immigrant or native groups in the United States and abroad. Most mother-tongue groups view their own language positively and with more emotional intensity than other tongues, even though the reasons underlying language loyalty may vary from group to group and place to place.[8] Equally consistent with findings from previous studies among other linguistic groups are these facts: a) the intensity of emotional involvement is stronger among those for whom the ethnic tongue is the first language, and as such is embedded in deep-seated affective experiences, than among those for whom it was a second or additional language unmediated by these factors; b) even though the intensity of attachment decreases with generational distance, language loyalty may and does persist over a period of time sustained by other factors, such as respect and interest;[9] c) attitudinal language loyalty does not necessarily correlate with behavioral commitment to it. Behavioral commitment to language loyalty seems to be primarily a function of linguistic ability, rather than overt attitudinal orientation, whether the latter be sustained by instrumental, ideological or affective considerations. While Mexican American College students favor Spanish language maintenance, they do not belittle the functional needs for English, and they are highly conscious of the potential or actual difficulties that ensue not only from limited English proficiency but accented English as well. Their apprehensions over accented speech should not be dismissed as mere projection of inner insecurities derived from a linguistic or non-

linguistic basis. We know from recent research that these beliefs are introjections from outer realities rather than mere projections of inner processes. English speech samples of Mexican American children have been judged by Anglo teachers as considerably more ethnic and substandard as compared with speech samples of Anglo and Black children of equivalent socioeconomic background. Hesitancy, passivity and low self-confidence have also been associated more often with Mexican American children's speech than with those of other subgroups.[10] In all instances, low class children, the most likely ones to need and benefit from bilingual education, have consistently been judged least favorably. These stereotypes, obtained from a Texas sample, are not necessarily confined to that state alone but may be prevalent in other Southwestern areas as well. Educators should address themselves to this problem not only in relation to providing the bilingual student with the most acceptable speech models of English, but also with regards to teachers' overt or covert attitudes towards accented speech and by extension towards the speaker himself. Attitudes may and do influence teacher's expectancies of their pupils, and these in turn affect the student's behavioral patterns and academic performance as well.

Since there seem to be generational and class differentials with regards to Spanish language loyalty, it is reasonable to assume that the rationales advances in favor of bilingual education itself will not be equally appealing to all subgroups involved. Bilingual competence as an end in itself would seem to appeal more to the younger and well-to-do generations than to older and less well-to-do minority members, whose main concerns are the mastery of English and status improvement. As bilingual education programs cater by and large to the more dispossessed groups, parents must be reassured through words and deeds that their children are in effect making substantial progress, academically and linguistically, and that in the end, when the transition to English is made,

these children will not suffer the same difficulties as the parents have suffered in the past.

Biculturalism, on the other hand, both as a goal and in terms of its implementation, seems a more problematic area. Cultural unity and biculturalism among Mexican Americans, in the sense of ethnic distinctiveness, seems to be favored only by a minority within the minority itself, among the students studied and the general population as well. The validation of cultural pluralism, among those who favor it, is rooted, however, in the past rather than the present. Support is sought from those very attributes that are least relevant to daily existential patterns and are embedded in the folk-culture of home and hearth. Instead the more selective aspects of ethnicity are invoked, those represented by the Spanish high-culture rooted in images of the collective--not individual--past and the exploits of mediate--not immediate--ancestors. This seeming deprecation of the folk-components of ethnicity and the preference for its more selective aspects may either respond to a process of de-ethnization in itself or the possibliity that the ethnic individual may derive greater security and comfort from a more transmuted type of ethnicity than that which characterizes his immediate surroundings. If in fact the ethnic individual finds himself more at ease with the high and more distant ethnic-related culture than his own variant, then it would seem that the inclusion of contrastive existential patterns between the minority and majority child in the cultural component of bilingual programs and in teacher training programs might achieve less for the minority child's sense of security than the teaching of the high culture. If one further takes into consideration that peer pressure and acceptance by one's peers are most acutely felt by young children, and that teachers' stereotypes are already loaded with differential perceptions and expectations, then the de-emphasizing of cultural differences and the stressing of

similarities would seem to be an important, if not essential, component as well. After all, one must not lose sight of the fact that man's definition of himself and others are not only molded by space and time, but changed by them as well, and that in spite of ever existing diversity, man's psychic organs of perception and human needs remain basically invariant across cultures and times.

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